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ABSTRACT

The Office of Institutional Research conducted an evaluation of the Pass-No Pass (P-N) grading system at the University of Wisconsin-Stephens Point. The second semester, 1971-72, was chosen for the basis of evaluation. Sources of information include student records, a brief questionnaire sent to students who chose at least one P-N course, and a brief questionnaire to faculty who taught the courses chosen under the P-N option. Findings and tables are listed. Investigator's conclusions indicate the P-N option produces lower quality scholarship, tampers with the integrity of the grade point ratio as an indicator of scholarship by inflating the GPR, and produces larger than normal student loads. The option tended to lower, rather than raise, student motivation. Questionnaires for students and faculty are included. (Author/MJM)

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Student Reactions
Faculty Comments

ED 076098

AN EVALUATION OF THE PASS-FAIL GRADING POLICY AT UW-STEVENS POINT

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PREFACE

In 1968 the faculty at UW-Stevens Point moved to the adoption of selected courses to be graded on the basis of pass or no pass (P-N), then referred to as the pass-no pass (P-NP) proposal. Approval was made at the May 2, 1968, meeting. The rationale for this plan included student selection of courses on the basis of "a personally and intellectually oriented motive instead of the pressure to secure and maintain a grade point average. It tends to encourage the student to take a course outside the field of his major concentration in which his prerequisite knowledge would not be adequate to sustain a high letter grade." The plan was cited as meeting University goals 2, 3, 4, and 7.

The general regulations provide that P shall stand for credit granted, N shall stand for no credit granted, and N shall be comparable to F in the A-B-C-D-F system. The student's GPA (GPR) will be caluculated only from grades in the A-B-C-D-F program. No more than 20 credits of P-N courses will be counted toward degree requirements. No more than two courses in the major and no more than one course in the minor may be taken on the P-N basis. The P-N program will not be open to freshmen or students on academic probation. A student may elect to come under the P-N program in eligible courses at the time of registration for the course after consultation with his academic advisor. The student will be limited to selecting one course per semester other than required Physical Education under the P-N option.

Departments were given the option of participation or not, and the right to determine which courses may be included in or excluded from the program, and under what conditions within the general regulations.

The program was to be implemented for the second semester, 1968-69. An evaluation of the program was to be made by March, 1971.

The P-N grading plan is coming up for review by the faculty, and possible expansion to include freshmen, during the 1972-73 school year. On October 16, 1972, Vice Chancellor Haferbecker requested the Office of Institutional Research to conduct an evaluation of the P-N plan prior to its review by the Faculty Senate.

PLAN FOR EVALUATING P-N

In keeping with the general principles of evaluation, the P-N grading plan is evaluated in terms of the stated purposes at the time of adoption by the faculty, plus any evidence of side effects of the program that may be observed. Answers were sought to the following questions:

1. Which are the P-N courses in which students enroll? How many are required courses? What is the P-N enrollment in each?
2. What are the GPR's of students enrolling in P-N courses?
3. What is the quality of work done in P-N courses?
4. Why do students elect P-N courses?
5. Do students electing P-N courses take heavier credit loads?
6. Is there any evidence that the taking of P-N courses tends to inflate the grade point ratios? If so, is there any serious consequence?
7. Do some kinds of courses adapt better to P-N grading than others? If so, which ones, and why?
8. Did the faculty find any problems in operating under the P-N policy?

The second semester, 1971-72, was chosen for the basis of the evaluation, since it was the most recent for which records were already available. Sources of information include student records, a brief questionnaire sent to students who chose at least one P-N course during the specified semester, and a brief questionnaire to faculty who taught the courses chosen under the P-N option. Both questionnaires are appended as part of this report.

FINDINGS

During the first semester, 1971-72, more than 1200 courses were taken under the P-N option. This number reflects a steady increase in the use of P-N during the seven semesters of its operation. In a few cases the letter grade was merely reported as P, and in a very few cases the actual letter grade earned was missing. As shown in Table 1, actual letter grades were obtained for 1097 courses taken under P-N, with 106 A grades and 30 F's. In addition, there were 39 W's (withdrawn) and 14 incompletes. The averaged grade point obtained for all letter grades given was 2.33. This average does not allow for varying number of credits per course: a matter for some, but not major, concern.

TABLE 1

ACTUAL EARNED GRADES IN P-N COURSES, SEM II, 1971-72

Letter Grade	No. Cases	Honor Points	
A	106	424	W: 39
B	369	1107	I: 14
C	434	868	GPR: 2.33 (averaged)
D	158	158	
F	30	0	
TOTALS	1097	2557	

We turn now to the grade point ratios of the P-N students in all work for Semester II, 1971-72, and to their cumulative grade point ratios at the end of the semester. The findings are as follows:

GPR Period	N	Honor Points	"Averaged" GPR
Cumulative	1206	3466.12	2.87
Semester II	1203	3594.83	2.99

It is clear that students taking P-N courses during Semester II, 1971-72, earned in those courses an averaged GPR that was 0.54 below their cumulative average GPR at that point, and 0.66 below their letter-grade GPR for that same semester. No statistical test is required to determine that these differences are significant.

A tally was made to determine how the P-N grade for the semester compared with the semester GPR and with the cumulative GPR at semester end. The number of cases falling in each category is shown as follows:

The P-N grade, compared to the overall GPR was:

	Higher	The Same	Lower
Compared to Cumulative:	260	7	827
Compared to Sem. II:	212	75	806

Thus it is clear that in the great majority of cases the P-N grade earned was below both the cumulative and the semester GPR.

Another question asked was whether or not the students enrolled in P-N courses tended to take heavier loads during semesters in which they are enrolled in the P-N courses. This is a difficult question to answer directly, for although the mean number of credits taken by 1210 P-N students was 15.57, with what can this be compared? We might compare it with findings of a study done for enrollments at WSU-SP for the first semester of 1969-70 [1] which showed that sophomores were enrolled for an average of 15.0 credits, juniors for 14.6 credits, and seniors for 13.9 credits. Comparable figures for the first semester of 1972-73 are:

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[1] See: "WSU-Student Loads Compared," Office of Institutional Research, Stevens Point, January, 1969, pp. 3-4.

sophomores, 14.86 credits; juniors, 14.82 credits; and seniors, 14.01 credits. Since the averages for each class level for the two semesters three years apart are quite comparable, we may conclude that the average number of credits taken at each level is quite fixed, and it falls near the two averages given. If this is the case, P-N students appear to be taking more credits on the average than other students. This conclusion may be subject to one limitation: part-time students probably tend to shy away from P-N courses. But even with this limitation it seems probable that P-N students tend to take more credits than do others.

STUDENT RESPONSES

A brief questionnaire to students (copy of which is appended to this report) sought out the motivation of students for taking P-N courses and their reactions after having taken at least one such course by the second semester, 1971-72. Of the more than 1200 students who were reported to have taken such a course, the form was sent to 420 students randomly selected, or about 35%. Responses were received from 267, or about 64% of those to whom the form was sent. The following responses were made by the 267 students.

To verify the records, the students were asked, "Have you taken on a pass-fail basis one or more courses at UW-Stevens Point? Yes____ No____." The responses totaled 265 Yes and 2 No, thus tending to verify the records. The "No" respondents were instructed to respond no further. A further statement reads "If yes, how many courses have you taken on a pass-fail basis?" Following is the distribution of these responses, based on 265 cases.

Unknown:	22
One Course:	78
Two Courses:	89
Three Courses:	47
Four Courses:	24
Five Courses:	5
TOTAL:	265

The next question was: "How much time did you spend on pass-fail courses compared to other courses?" The responses totaled as follows:

Unknown:	2
More Time and Effort:	12
About the Same Time and Effort:	142
Less Time and Effort:	109

Thus it appears that nearly 30 per cent of the respondents had taken three or more P-N courses, with a mode of two courses. Nearly 40% indicated that they had put less time and effort on P-N courses than on other courses.

TABLE 2

REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE PASS-FAIL OPTION: COMPARED TO THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT ON THE COURSE

Time & Effort Spent on P-N Course	Checked	Not Checked	Totals
	a LEARN WITHOUT PRESSURE OR EMOTIONAL STRAIN		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	7	5	12
About the Same	91	51	142
Less Time	55	54	109
TOTALS	155	110	265
$\chi^2 = 4.7051$			
	b REMOVE THE INHIBITION OF A GRADING SYSTEM		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	5	7	12
About the Same	69	73	142
Less Time	43	66	109
TOTALS	119	146	265
$\chi^2 = 2.1269$			
	c PURSUE AN ACADEMICALLY UNFAMILIAR AREA WITHOUT FEAR OF A POOR GRADE		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	3	9	12
About the Same	69	73	142
Less Time	52	57	109
TOTALS	126	139	265
$\chi^2 = 2.4943$			

TABLE 2 - Continued

Time & Effort Spent on P-N Course	Checked	Not Checked	Totals
	d SATISFY MY INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY IN AREA OUTSIDE MY MAJOR		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	2	10	12
About the Same	27	115	142
Less Time	16	93	109
TOTALS	47	218	265
$\chi^2 = 0.8185$			
	e ACCEPT A PASS IN ORDER TO DEVOTE MORE TIME TO MY OTHER SCHOOL SUBJECTS		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	6	6	12
About the Same	74	68	142
Less Time	93	16	109
TOTALS	175	90	265
$\chi^2 = 31.6012$	Reject Chance		
	f CARRY MORE CREDITS THAN COULD HAVE BEEN CARRIED WITHOUT A PASS-FAIL COURSE		
Unknown	2	0	2
More Time	0	12	12
About the Same	17	125	142
Less Time	12	97	109
TOTALS	31	234	265
$\chi^2 = 1.6161$			
	g OTHER REASONS		
Unknown	0	2	2
More Time	0	12	12
About the Same	19	123	142
Less Time	8	101	109
TOTALS	27	238	265

The foregoing table summarizes responses to the request, "Please check your reason or reasons for choosing the pass-fail option," related to the question: "How much time and effort did you spend on pass-fail course(s) compared to other courses?" About 58% of the respondents checked the reason: "Learn without pressure or emotional strain." Also 119 or about 43% checked the response: "Remove the inhibition of a grading system." About 47% chose the statement: "Pursue an academically unfamiliar area without fear of a poor grade." Only 47 students (17%) gave as a reason: "Satisfy my intellectual curiosity in an area outside my major." It is interesting to note that 175 respondents, or 66% gave the reason: "Accept a pass in order to devote more time to my other school subjects." Only 12% of the respondents said they used the option to carry more credits than could have been carried without a pass-fail course. About 10% of the respondents checked "Other reasons." The reasons given, and the accompanying comments, are shown as follows. The responses appear to center around three ideas: avoidance of physical education grades, fear that the grade point ratio would be lowered, and desire to "enjoy" a course without being held strictly to its standards.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PASS-FAIL GRADING

RESPONSES

2. If yes, please check your reason or reasons for choosing the pass-fail option.
g. Other (explain)

---

1. One of the courses I took was Lecture Forum which, I believe, is only offered on a pass-fail basis. The other course I took was a Phy. Ed. class, so that I wouldn't have to worry about the grade, I got lowering my grade point.

2. Take Phy. Ed. courses pass-fail to get credit without spending anytime at them.

3. Rely on motivation besides grading.

4. Get an easy grade.

5. Two courses only offered on pass-fail basis.

6. Since I consider transfer credits as pass-fail because they don't affect my grade point average; I wasn't hesitant to take courses this summer even though I had 2 jobs. As a result of not having the mental pressure of working for A's I learned with less effort and succeeded in getting A's anyway. (This has happened with 12 of my credits)

7. It's one course I could let slide for a time when I got behind in another course that I was trying to mark in.

8. Twice in Phy. Ed. - since I strongly feel such a course can not be graded fairly.

9. Knew was not co-ordinated in Phy. Ed.

10. Since it was a Phy. Ed. course, I didn't want to take the chance of having a low grade affect my Grade Point Average.

11. Phy. Ed. & my physical abilities should not affect my academic standing. It should not be graded or even required. (Phy. Ed.)

12. Rather uncoordinated - feared I may do poorly in Phy. Ed.

13. Also heard the teacher was really difficult and again - fear of a low grade from him.

14. Phy. Ed. courses which we are required to take. By taking it Pass-Fail I can enjoy the activity without pressure of grade.

15. (That about sums it up) Marked all of them a. through g.

16. In some cases (Phy. Ed. 101) I don't think a grade can fairly be given. Here Pass-Fail is especially favorable.

17. Two courses were offered only on pass-fail.

18. Fulfill requirement in Phy. Ed. without worrying about the grade.

19. A C or lower grade in a Phy. Ed. course can ruin a 3.00 or better grade point.

20. I had heard my particular teacher was a very hard grader and I didn't want to harm my grade point.

21. Since I wanted to be able to relax and enjoy the course I wanted to not have to worry about a grade - for me the pressure of a grade would have ruined any benefit I could have gotten from the course.

22. It was offered only on Pass-Fail.

23. Also to reduce the anxiety created by taking a very weak area in one's ability.

24. I took Phy. Ed. courses on pass-fail because I do not believe that non-academic credits should be used in determining one's academic grade point.

25. Have only taken Phy. Ed. on Pass-Fail. Am physically uncoordinated and don't see why that should affect my academic grade point.

26. Should be able to drop Pass-Fail if you have a high grade in the course.

27. I should explain that the course I took was (Phy. Ed. 101); I wasn't too skilled in either area so in order to not suffer the consequences of my inabilities, I took it on pass-fail.

28. One course I believed would be just a repeat of information gained from other courses, but I was required to take it as part of Secondary Education (Natural Res. 370) I believe another instructor could have made this an interesting and worthwhile course. The one I had did not --

29. When taking a Phy. Ed. course Pass-Fail, a person's ability or lack of it in this area doesn't hurt the grade point as a letter grade might.

30. To see what effect it would have on my overall course outlook.

31. One's grade doesn't necessarily reflect the knowledge learned in the class.

32. One of the two was Phy. Ed. - took it pass-fail to avoid a C grade or lower.

33. To get through generally required courses without lowering grade point.

34. Reputation of low grading professor.

35. Did not feel Phy. Ed. requirement constituted a genuine educational experience so did not want to jeopardize grade point.

36. Instructor recommended it.

37. Two courses in my major were only offered on a pass-fail basis.

38. To fill requirements in a subject for which I had no interest.

39. Two credits were only offered on pass-fail.

40. I was not interested in the course as much as several other at the time.

41. I do not feel a grade should be received in Phy. Ed. or any other subject that is "ungradable" -- where a true grade as such is hard to assign.

42. Phy. Ed. - I could see no reason to take it for a grade - I enjoy the class for itself and not a requirement and grade.

43. Lecture Forum is only offered pass-fail.

44. The courses I have taken pass-fail thus far have been required courses. The concept of required courses (outside my major or minor) disgust me -- therefore I choose pass-fail. If I had my way every required course (outside the major or minor) would have pass-fail option.

45. Required for Phy. Ed. major.

In response to the question, "For what purpose(s) did you use pass-fail course(s)?" The following tables summarize responses to each portion of the question, related to the amount of time respondents said they spent on P-N course compared to other courses. Table 3-a indicates that 58, or 21.9%, indicated that the P-N choice was made for work in the major. Most of these 58 said they spent about the same amount of time on the P-N course while 5 said they spent more time and 22 said they spent less time.

Only 15 students reported using the P-N option for work in the minor, as shown in Table 3-b. This is only 5.8% of respondents. Most of these reported time spent similar to that of other courses.

Table 3-c shows that 203 of 265 respondents indicated that the P-N option was used to fulfill a requirement not in the major or minor. Only 5 said they spent more time on the course, 111 said the time spent was about the same as on other courses, and 85 said they spent less time.

As shown in Table 3-d, the P-N option was used by 69 respondents, or 26%, for elective courses. Only 3 of them said they spent more time on the course than on others, while 28 said they spent less time. Thus there is no evidence that the choice of an elective course caused P-N students to spend more time on the course than they otherwise would.

Only 17 or 6.3% used the P-N option for "other purpose" according to responses. All of these students claimed to have devoted either the same amount of time or less time on such a course than on other courses. Viewing all the data of Table 3, we may conclude that the purpose for which the P-N course was used has little relationship to the amount of time devoted to the course. Responses to the "other purpose" choice (question 4e) are listed as follows. Nine responses refer to physical education. Very few mentioned the pursuit of special interests.

TABLE 3

FOR WHAT PURPOSE(S) DID YOU USE THE PASS-FAIL COURSE(S): COMPARED TO THE AMOUNT OF TIME SPENT ON THE COURSE

Time & Effort Spent on P-N Course	[a] FOR WORK IN MAJOR: Pertained	Did not Pertain
Unknown	0	2
More Time	5	7
About the Same	31	111
Less Time	22	87
TOTALS	58	207
	[b] FOR WORK IN MINOR	
Unknown	0	2
More Time	0	12
About the Same	12	130
Less Time	3	106
TOTALS	15	250
	[c] FULFILL A REQUIREMENT NOT IN MAJOR OR MINOR	
Unknown	2	0
More Time	5	7
About the Same	111	31
Less Time	85	24
TOTALS	203	62

TABLE 3 - Continued

Time & Effort Spent on P-N Course	[d] ELECTIVE COURSE Pertained	Did not Pertain
Unknown	2	0
More Time	3	9
About the Same	36	106
Less Time	28	81
TOTALS	69	196
	[e] OTHER PURPOSE	
Unknown	0	2
More Time	0	12
About the Same	9	133
Less Time	8	101
TOTALS	17	248

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PASS-FAIL GRADING

RESPONSES

4. For what purpose (s) did you use the pass-fail course(s)? (Please check)
e. Other (specify)

---

1. Phy. Ed. requirement as I am not very physically adept, yet very much self-conscious.
2. To fulfill a requirement in an area that I have never received good grades in even though I work just as hard as any other class.
3. Heres a chance to take a course that could be enjoyed rather than adding the extra pressure that comes when trying to make a grade.
4. I needed to concentrate more fully on my major courses.
5. Interested in possibly going on for masters in counceling - so wanted psych courses.
6. Pursue an interesting area.
7. One course just to add a credit.
8. To fulfill required Phy. Ed. courses.
9. Phy. Ed.
10. History & Phy. Ed.
11. Phy. Ed. 101 (SRC swimming)
12. Also to acquaint myself with areas of interest and not worry about being exceptional students in the area. Ex.: Phy. Ed.
13. Phy. Ed.
14. Phy. Ed.
15. It was for work in major - though was one of a choice - not definitely required.
16. To look into a field that could potentially be my major.
17. To be able to devote more time to my major.
18. Phy. Ed.
19. Self improvement.
20. I've only used it in Phy. Ed. 101 courses.
21. To not have to go through all the busy work in a boring - uninteresting course.

TABLE 4

REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE P-N OPTION: COMPARED TO WORTHWHILENESS OF TAKING THE P-N COURSE

Worthwhile to Take a P-N Course	a LEARN WITHOUT PRESSURE OR EMOTIONAL STRAIN Pertained	 Did not Pertain
Yes	142	93
No	12	17
Undecided	1	0
TOTALS	155	110
$\chi^2 = 3.8526$		
	b REMOVE THE INHIBITION OF A GRADING SYSTEM	
Yes	108	127
No	11	18
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	119	146
$\chi^2 = .6715$		
	c PURSUE AN ACADEMICALLY UNFAMILIAR AREA WITHOUT FEAR OF A POOR GRADE	
Yes	116	119
No	10	19
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	126	139
$\chi^2 = 2.2905$		
	d SATISFY MY INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY IN AN AREA OUTSIDE MY MAJOR	
Yes	44	191
No	3	26
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	47	218
$\chi^2 = 1.2382$		

TABLE 4 - Continued

Worthwhile to Take a P-N Course	e ACCEPT A PASS IN ORDER TO DEVOTE MORE TIME TO MY OTHER SCHOOL SUBJECTS Pertained	Did not Pertain
Yes	155	80
No	19	10
Undecided	1	0
TOTALS	175	90
$\chi^2 = 0.0022$		
	f CARRY MORE CREDITS THAN COULD HAVE BEEN CARRIED WITHOUT A PASS-FAIL COURSE	
Yes	31	204
No	0	29
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	31	234
$\chi^2 = 4.3344$		
	g OTHER REASONS	
Yes	26	209
No	1	28
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	27	238
$\chi^2 = 1.6305$		

TABLE 5

WORTHWHILENESS OF P-N COURSE: COMPARED TO AMOUNT OF TIME AND EFFORT SPENT

Worthwhile to Take a P-N Course	TIME AND EFFORT SPENT ON P-N COURSE			
	Unknown	More Time	About the Same Time	Less Time
Yes	2	8	129	96
No	0	3	13	13
Undecided	0	1	0	0
TOTALS	2	12	142	109

The distributions of Tables 4 and 5 show that the worthwhileness of taking the P-N course was positively related to (1) the purpose of accepting a pass to devote more time to other subjects and (2) learn without pressure or emotional strain.

TABLE 6

WORTHWHILENESS OF P-N COURSE: COMPARED TO P-N PURPOSES

Worthwhile to Take a P-N Course	Pertained	Did not Pertain
	[a] FOR WORK IN MAJOR	
Yes	47	188
No	10	19
Undecided	1	0
TOTALS	58	207
	[b] FOR WORK IN MINOR	
Yes	15	220
No	0	29
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	15	250
	[c] FULFILL A REQUIREMENT NOT IN MAJOR OR MINOR	
Yes	187	48
No	16	13
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	203	62
	[d] ELECTIVE COURSE	
Yes	64	171
No	5	24
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	69	196

TABLE 6 - Continued

Worthwhile to Take a P-N Course	OTHER PURPOSE[e]	
	Pertained	Did not Pertain
Yes	16	219
No	1	28
Undecided	0	1
TOTALS	17	248

From Table 6 it is clear that only one student use of the P-N courses is related positively to the worthwhileness of taking the course: fulfilling a requirement not in major or minor.

Table 7 was prepared to determine how widely the P-N option is used among students of various majors. The table shows that nearly all majors are represented among those taking P-N courses, but not in proportion to the numbers of such majors overall. For example, eccnomics, geography, and physics majors apparently are not electing such courses frequently. In proportion to their numbers, sociology majors are among the most frequent users of the P-N option.

TABLE 7

DECLARED FIRST MAJORS OF PASS-FAIL STUDENTS; SEM. II, 1971-72

American Civilization	2	Music Education	4
Art	23	Natural Resources	1
Biology	52	Philosophy	4
Business Administration	50	Physical Education	35
Business Education	21	Physics	0
Chemistry	9	Political Science	31
Communication	26	Psychology	59
Communicative Disorders	49	Pulp & Paper	2
Deaf Education	24	Resource Management	39
Dietetics	8	Russian & East Cent. European Studies	0
Drama	3	Social Science	11
Economics	7	Sociology & Anthropology	84
Elementary Education	152	Soils	7
English	58	Spanish	6
Experimental Foods	0	Water	22
Food & Nutrition	7	Wildlife	31
Forestry	39	Undecided	61
French	7	Engineering	3
General Science	5	Dentistry	3
Geography	19	Accounting	1
German	15	Medicine	3
History	70	Art Education	9
Home Economics	5	No Major Code	13
Home Economics Education	41	Social Work	5
Home Economics in Business	23	Physical Therapy	4
Latin American Studies	0	Nursing	1
Mathematics	36	Theology	1
Medical Technology	24	Law	1
Music	32		
		TOTAL	1,473

Students polled through the questionnaire were asked to look in retrospect at their P-N courses by answering the question: "Knowing what you do now, do you consider it worthwhile to have taken the course(s) you did on the pass-fail basis? Yes _____ No _____ If not, why not? (Explain)" The following summary of comments together with yes and no responses gives a good idea how students viewed the courses after taking them. Altogether there were _____ Yes responses and _____ No responses. Of the students whose comments appear in the summary, 32 said Yes and 27 said No to the question stated above. The responses show that most students are not thinking about the benefits of a grading system at all, but rather how to "beat" the system using P-N courses strategically. A number of them said they were "relieved of the tensions of grading" but some admitted that this resulted in a letdown in their work. Many wished they had elected a grade because they did well in the course.

Besides Lecture Forum, the physical education courses were the ones most frequently mentioned as fitting the P-N option for their purposes. This view can readily be understood. The motor skills, which often dominate physical education, have zero correlation with the cognitive skills which are predominant in most academic work.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PASS-FAIL GRADING

RESPONSES

5. Knowing what you now know, do you consider it worthwhile to have taken the course(s) you did on the pass-fail basis? Yes _____ No _____
If not, why not? (Explain)

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1. No I received A's in two out of three subjects which I took on pass-fail -- Child Psych. & American Lit.

2. Yes But there is one bad point about pass-fail courses. If a student transfers to a different University - they will not transfer.

3. Yes Because it was more relaxing learning and No, because I'm getting A's in my two pass-fail courses this semester and I could have used the four points.

4. No I took Psychology 200 - and find that I am getting an A in the class. I can not help but regret my decision. However, the policy is a good one; students should have the option.

5. Yes Note: that sometimes I have done better in for instance a social science course, would have received an A, instead had to accept "P". It's a worthwhile gamble in this sense.

6. Yes Unfortunately the course had a bad lab program. This made it rather unbearable - so, a pass-fail program let me devote my time to courses with a more worthwhile content. (bad means -- poor teacher, equipment, and atmosphere)

7. Yes I don't feel I should have to compete with majors in a field on their level when I'm simply meeting a university requirement.

8. Yes I believe that the pass-fail program is worthwhile and should be continued. Wish I had taken more pass-fail courses. Do not feel although that more than one pass-fail course should be allowed in the students major.

9. Yes Being a Phy. Ed. major, history on a pass-fail basis was an advantage because I could devote more time to my major study area - I didn't feel pressured!

10. Yes Except as it turned out I devoted more time than necessary to receive the pass. Just for my own benefit, I guess.

11. Yes Enjoyed very much those courses and got much out of them without having to be graded. I think that more information as to the courses offering the option should be given because students don't really know which ones are.

12. Yes Pass-fail is far superior to the grade system but fails in the effect that prestige wise it can't compete with a grade system, therefore, again forcing a student to resort to grades and compete as in grade school and high school.

13. No I find that in order to keep up with the subject matter in a course one devotes just as much time and effort to a class on pass-fail. As he would to a class given on the regular grading scale.

14. No Mainly because the course wasn't worthwhile to begin with. I know that I didn't put any effort into the course, and therefore I got very little out of it.

15. Yes Well I felt the strain or the knowing I had to learn disappear. But I also am the person who won't let myself get a real bad grade in the course even if it was on pass-fail. So if I felt it was worthwhile to take the courses on pass-fail but my only gripe is -- if I do just as well on pass-fail then I should take the grade. But I really don't enjoy learning with that pressure of knowing you have to. Instead I enjoyed learning with I want to!

16. Yes The only trouble I had once was that I could have gotten an "A" instead of a "P" in one of the courses I took on pass-fail and I wish I could have withdrawn from the pass-fail I had signed up for.

17. Yes I would never take another course on pass-fail. The teacher expects too much work and extra studying from the students. I think most students take a course on pass-fail in order to gain more personal knowledge or they know they won't do very well in the course (a required one). I feel that if a student takes a course on pass-fail he should not have to do the same amount of work as those taking the course for a grade. However, I do think those taking it on pass-fail should be required to do some work other than attend class.

18. Yes Two of my three pass-fail courses would have been a waste of time to have studied irrelevant materials just for the grade and did in fact devote more time to my other classes. The third course I took for my own benefit and did not want to detract from its quality by sweating about the grade. I think all courses should be pass-fail offered but I agree with present rules about 20 credits total, 5 credits a semester and the 2 course major and 1 course minor rule.

19. No My teacher,(_____),was such a lousy teacher that I learned absolutely nothing from the course. I attended class and found that I could get a "B" in the class without reading the book or paying attention to his _____ lectures.

20. Yes For reasons A and D in question #2.

21. No If I would not have had the course pass-fail I would most likely have gotten an A. If you get an F on a pass-fail course it counts on your G.P.A. I think an A in a pass-fail course should also count on your G.P.A.!

22. No I could have gotten much more out of the course had I some incentive to study. Since the courses were requirements - I really didn't care too much about the course and the no grade policy just left me sluff off.

23. No I worked just as hard on that course as I did any other and it probably wouldn't have affected my grade point much anyway since I did well in the course.

24. Yes But it seems I've done better in the two courses I've taken than the rest on my respective schedule - I do, however, think favorably on the pass-fail program here.

25. No I received a B+ in the course which would have benifited my G.P.A. However, because I took it pass-fail it did not help my G.P.A. -- There should be the option offered the student to drop the pass-fail if he is doing well in the course so he can receive credit in his G.P.A.

26. Yes One curiousity I found was that I spent less time studying (rarely studied) took test apathetically, not under pressure, and did well on them. What I'm trying to say is, while taking a course pass-fail I studied the material less - went into tests with no pressure and actually recalled more!! I got A's and B's in my pass-fail courses and hardly studied!! Just the fact of not having to worry if I did well on a test, allowed me to concentrate on the material from lectures - that is, I didn't need to study because lack of pressure allowed me to remember material from lectures without actually reviewing it.

27. No With more mental application I would have pulled an A and improved my grade point.

28. No I did not learn a thing and found myself slacking off in my efforts to do well.

29. No Because I did better than I had expected, I sometimes wish I hadn't. However the pressure of the class with grades would have made me emotionally nervous.

30. Yes I'd consider it worthwhile if you are taking the course outside of your major you can devote more of your time to your major. I think it is nice to be able to take humanities on pass-fail. In fact it would be nice to take science on pass-fail if they are only needed for requirements.

31. Yes Pass-fail courses do take off a certain amount of pressure and I do feel they should be offered in more areas and be used more liberally to allow students to take courses they may be afraid of. Students should have option of taking pass-fail at end of semester if he fears bad grade might lower his G.P.A.

32. Yes I feel that freshmen should be allowed to take some courses on pass-fail option, especially Phy. Ed.

33. No Possibly, if there were no grades for all courses taken in a semester, then one would have complete independent study and one would take the courses for the knowledge involved (ie; for the sake of the courses themselves). But having only one or a few courses on pass-fail and the rest on a regular grading system, the tendency is to apply more time to the "graded" courses and to let the pass-fail courses slip as easy grades (ie; to spend more time on "graded" courses and less time on pass-fail courses).

34. No Somehow I devoted enough time and effort into the class to get an "A" in it if I would have taken it on a grade basis. This way I lost out on the point value of the A, and didn't get the full value in a grade point.

35. No I got very good grades in all of them. I don't know if it was because the pressure and emotional strain was gone or if the courses just came particularily easy to me. You have to decide too soon about the pass-fail option before you really know what the course is like.

36. No I found myself not studying much at all in this course since I was sure I would pass.

37. No I feel that if I had not taken these courses pass-fail I would have put more time into it and learned quite a lot more. Also, I think it's unfair that certain classes are offered pass-fail and others aren't.

38. Yes I feel it was good because I didn't feel emotional pressure. However, I was somewhat disappointed: while I put less effort into the classes, I earned A's in them - quite a paradox! If I hadn't taken them pass-fail, I could have bettered my grade point. I think the student ought to have the option to change from pass-fail to a letter grade if he wishes.

39. Yes One course I would have received an A in and one a D so in that one instance it was beneficial. On the whole, I think pass-fail options should be eliminated.

40. No Basically I think the pass-fail program is a very good idea and I plan to take more classes under it. However, the teacher I had for it was a real for grading. Practically everyone in the class was on pass-fail and over 1/3 failed. I wonder if this didn't have to do with the teacher's belief that students would just mess around in pass-fail courses.

41. Yes Because some courses are well instructed and organized, therefore, a minimal amount of outside independent study outside class besides the normal outside work. No, because I have had a bad course on pass-fail. The course has a poor instructor who does not teach hardly anything in class. He takes it for granted that somewhere you will find and learn the information even though there is no all-encompassing textbook. The lab is over-crowded, and there is no way all the students can work in lab the same time, space and equipment. Then the reagents were missing or empty when I found time to come to lab at night. The course is an all or nothing affair. You must study for a B or A or have a tough time.

42. Yes In some ways yes and no. Yes because it allowed me to carry an additional couple credits beyond what I feel I could have taken and no because for the time I spent towards the course anyway I could have received a B or so. Yet it alleviated pressure and anxiety about a course.

43. No I would have had at least a B.

44. Yes The course was _____ (and Lecture Forum). _____ as it was taught then involved enormous quantities of outside reading upon which the exam questions were dependent - all for only 1 credit. I did not feel it a worthwhile effort to even try to accomplish such a great amount of reading for only one credit - it would have involved more work than any of my other 3 credit courses. Pass-fail was a perfect solution.

45. No To the point that the first semester it was beneficial but the second semester I could have gotten a good grade which would have helped my grade point.

46. Yes It is worthwhile for me because Phy. Ed. is not my best subject, and if I don't take it pass-fail, and get a "C" in it, it brings down my overall G.P.A. and my academic record, even though it's not an academic course.

47. Yes It is in my opinion that the pass-fail option should be granted after a semester instead of before. I think that after a student has received his grades, that he should be allowed to choose what course he wanted on pass-fail. I know of some students who have done very well (speaking strictly in terms of grades) in certain subject areas and have had that course on a pass-fail basis. As a result they lost out on a "good grade" (A or B). After all, hardly anybody likes to consider themself average.

48. Yes Only because it allowed me to spend more time in my major field of interest.

49. No At the time, I thought it was but now I say "No" since I would have received 2 A's and would have liked the grade points.

50. Yes Even though I would have gotten a high grade, I feel it was worth it. I had less on my mind and I knew I could always let up on the work for the pass-fail course.

51. - Up to the individual.

52. No Because after taking the course I found out that you had to do lots better work to get a pass and I would have just as soon took that grade.

53. No I received a B which I would have liked to have had on my record.

54. Yes I've taken Phy. Ed. all on pass-fail and I found it very advantageous. You don't have to worry so much about it and you don't have to worry how good you are in it. I took one course in my major pass-fail and I'm a senior and it's a freshman class and I didn't want to have to worry about it.

55. No The requirements to pass the course I took, took all incentive out of trying to learn the material. It was foolish and put more of a strain on me than my other courses because attendance was mandatory.

56. No To just one course taken on pass-fail I felt that I had limited knowledge in one field but because the teacher taught the class so well, I would have received an A in the course.

57. Yes I think it is beneficial to take Phy. Ed. courses on pass-fail. I am super-unathletic and I didn't do too-well grade-wise when pass-fail wasn't in effect.

58. Yes Despite the course being on pass-fail, I feel that I spent the same amount of time and tried just as hard to get the best grade that I could in the course. I wanted to learn the material. This is probably what motivated me. I also wanted to prove to myself that I am learning for the sake of learning and not for a grade or credit.

59. No Mainly because of my 3 credit history course that I had to do lots and lots of work for. My Phy. Ed. classes were worth taking on pass-fail and I will probably continue to do so.

60. No I took two Phy. Ed. courses pass-fail because I had previously received C's in two other Phy. Ed. courses and didn't want anymore C's. I later found the instructor in the courses I had the pass-fail's in didn't give C's. I wanted to take my Phy. Ed. courses for fun and exercises and with no fear of having a test grade bringing my final grade down. The teacher in my pass-fail courses didn't give tests. I really did come out ahead. By the way, Phy. Ed. were the only courses I took that I could take on pass-fail.

A brief form was sent to faculty members who were known to have had one or more P-N students during the semester studied. From the 114 who we sent such forms, 78 usable responses were received, or better than a 68% response.

The faculty responses to the first question on the form totaled: Yes 2 No 76, comments on this and other questions to the faculty follow.

FACULTY RESPONSE

Question 1 asked of faculty who were known to have had pass-fail students reads: Did you conduct the class(es) any differently when pass-fail students are involved? Following is a summary of faculty responses received. A number in parentheses following a statement indicates how many faculty responded in almost precisely the words used. Single responses are not followed by a number.

Comments

1. "No. There is no way of knowing which students are on pass-fail." (12)
2. "No. I didn't know who was on pass-fail and who wasn't. I strongly urge we retain this policy."
3. "No. I don't make it my business to know if pass-fail students are in my class before final exams and grades."
4. "No. It seems to me that I have had 2 or 3 pass-fail students in my classes but I wasn't aware of it at the time and did not do anything differently. It does seem that the pass-fail students I have had have done better than C work."
5. "No. The number of students enrolled on a pass-fail basis, if any, was very small."
6. "No. But I did ask the students on pass-fail to mention the fact to me."
7. "No. I am not aware that any students were registered on pass-fail, only it probably would have made no difference."
8. "No. I found pass-fail students often less motivated, however."
9. "No. I was under the impression that we were not to ask students if they were taking the course pass-fail or not. I have, therefore, not been aware when a pass-fail student was in attendance."
10. "No. I did not, to my knowledge, have any pass-fail students during second semester, 1971-72. There is, however, no way I can be sure since they are not identified. The pass-fail students who pass are identified on the grade sheets by P (which I have checked carefully and there are none), but those who fail are never identified to the instructor, which makes this whole survey meaningless."
11. "No. Since I had no knowledge of the presence of pass-fail students, I couldn't have made any differentiation."
12. "Yes. Since pass-fail students are inclined to do less reading, and discussion of readings is my main concern in interdisciplinary courses, this factor had to be taken into account."

13. "No. My classes are NOT exclusively for pass-fail students, hence I conduct them as I do where ALL students are standardly graded."

14. "?. The instructors are not properly notified that they have pass-fail enrollment. I think that this should be changed. Tests do not need to be graded with the same detail for pass-fail students. Possibly these students should even have different tests.

15. "No. Of course, I had no idea if any of my students had selected the pass-fail option. I assumed there were only a very small minority of them.

In summary, only one of the responding instructors conducted the class any different. Almost none was aware that P-N students were in their classes.

Question 2 asked of faculty who were known to have had pass-fail students reads: Were grading standards any different in pass-fail courses from other courses? Following are the comments given to question 2.

Comments

1. "No. There is no way of knowing which students are on pass-fail."
2. "Yes. During the semester I gave out no grades to pass-fail students but "Pass", "May-Pass", "Fail"."
3. "No. Most students in my classes Math 310 and Math Ed. 319 were required to take these courses because they were elem. ed. majors."
4. "No. But awarded lengthy consideration of border-line grading for pass-fail students."
5. "No. Don't know which students are pass-fail."
6. "No. A number of students who received good grades under the pass-fail felt that pass-fail should never have been available to them."
7. "No. The pass-fail option should not alter standards."
8. "No. All grading is based on a percentage basis with 90+ = A, 80+ = B, etc. The student receives the grade corresponding to the percentage he earns regardless of the pass-fail option."
9. "No. D was a pass."
10. "No. However, I feel that a grade of "D" should not constitute a passing (P) grade on pass-fail system."
11. "No. Grading proceeded the same in the course as it did previous to being pass-fail; and some procedures and standards as in other courses were followed."
12. "No. I could if I had wanted to. I make no effort to determine the presence of pass-fail students."
13. "?. Since in no case did the instructor (unless by accident) know precisely which students were on pass-fail, it did not seem that this could influence grading procedures. There were always some students not on pass-fail (such as majors or minors in American Civ.)."
14. "?. Since I was unaware of which students had elected the pass-fail option, grading standards were no different."
15. "?. I assumed there were only a very small minority of such students and did not change teaching or grading policy. However, as a sizeable number of students were enrolled and who had selected the pass-fail option, I would seriously consider changing the grading system."

16. "No, All students were graded on the same criteria."

17. "No. My grading policy is consistent for all students in my classes."

Summarizing responses to question 2, it can be said that only one instructor indicated any different grading standards for P-N students. Quite a few clearly thought there should be no such distinctions.

Responses to question 2 totaled: Yes 1 No 76.

Question 3 asked of faculty who were known to have had pass-fail students reads: Did you have any class which included both pass-fail students and non-pass-fail students? If yes, did the inclusion of both kinds of students pose any difficulties to you as instructor? Following are the comments given to question 3.

1. "?. I seldom actually know which are on pass-fail. When I have known, there has not been any difficulty."

2. "No. Only one comment -- grades of A, B or C should be pass, D and F should be fail: change the present system."

3. "?. Posed no problems for me. Taking a class on a pass-fail basis reduces their motivation and achievement. In many cases it is easy to pick out the students on pass-fail because they do little work."

4. "No. But the effort put forth by the pass-fail students was very noticeable."

5. "No. It didn't."

6. "No. I didn't know their identity."

7. "No. I didn't know which students were pass-fail and non-pass-fail students until a couple of the students mentioned they were taking it on a pass-fail basis."

8. "No. Pass-fail students earning an A up to final time will not take final or attend class the last couple of weeks unless final is weighed heavily enough to have such conduct result in an F."

9. "?. I could have been saved a great deal of time and effort at the end of the semester if I had known, at that point, which students were taking the course pass-fail. This is particularly true with students on the border between two grades, D-C, C-B, B-A, going in to the final exam. I may spend a half hour deciding, on my essay finals, whether a student should receive a C+ or B- only to discover, after the fact, that it was all wasted effort since the course was being taken pass-fail."

10. "No. Not that many are on pass-fail as far as I know."

11. "No. I don't think so."

12. "No. All of my courses (PE 101 sections) were of this type. I never knew until final grade sheets were forwarded."

13. "?. There is no way of knowing which students are on pass-fail."

14. "Yes. In one instance a pass-fail student was making an A. He could not change and lost incentive for the course; just drifted through. In general pass-fail students lose a motivation they otherwise would have had.

15. "No. The only GENERAL problem remains that some pass-fail students (a minority) believe that if they attend class and hand in any work they should automatically receive a "pass" -- I, at least, insist that they do "acceptable" work during the semester to receive a "pass"."

16. "?. I believe it is university policy that instructors are not informed which students in their classes are enrolled on a pass-fail or A, B, C, etc. basis. At any rate, I was not aware of the basis on which students were to be graded. As explained earlier, the number of students enrolled pass-fail was certainly very small."

17. "No. I do not change the content nor standards."

18. "?. Tendency to "pass" marginal students."

19. "No. Found pass-fail students did as well or better then the others."

20. "No. I did find, by accident, that some pass-fail students were not doing the reading."

21. "?. For 3 semesters <u>after</u> my grades were given to the registrar I asked for a list of students taking the course as pass-fail. The 3 or 4 students that failed during this period were all in the pass-fail category. The attitude of doing the minimum to "get by" is prevelant in this group."

22. "?. Our music courses are "skills" courses, and the question arises as to how "skillful" a non-music major should be in comparison to music majors."

23. "Yes. The pass-fail students have poor attitudes in general. They are also less motivated than regular students in some cases."

24. "Yes. Since I do not know who is pass-fail and who isn't, it is impossible to be discriminating. I teach each class as though all enrolled were "regular" students."

25. "No. With the registration information provided me I have no way of telling if I have <u>any</u> pass-fail students."

26. "No. The pass-fail students (known to me) did, however, tend to fall into the "D" category when they could probably have attained B's or C's. This interpretation, however, is based only on students who revealed to me that they were on pass-fail and therefore not concerned with a grade."

27. "?. I didn't know what students or what classes were using pass-fail."

28. "?. I was not even aware that the course was being taken under this option and probably would not have changed the instruction or grading anyway."

29. "No. Because I never know when a student is taking the course on a pass-fail option until after the semester is over."

30. "?. Not difficulties as a result of inclusion of both kinds of students. The difficulty arose from the <u>laziness</u>. I wasn't aware that a course could be offered pass-fail <u>only</u>. I'd like to do a pass-fail only course. I'd handle the class completly differently from my usual course organization."

31. "No. No difficulties for me, but I did feel that pass-fail students did not learn as much, especially those who admitted they chose the option because they were afraid they would get a low grade. (The course was statistics, which is difficult for some, and required.)"

32. "?. It was not apparent at the time that there were difficulties; in retrospect I find there may have been some, not only for me in grading especially, but for other "non-pass-fail" students who may have been frustrated by the others in class. In any case, I doubt that in the future I will ever offer a course pass-fail; I will be interested in seeing the evidence in support of the reasons or benefits advanced by the proponents of pass-fail having been fulfilled."

33. "?. Is there a way to tell them apart? Might the differences be marked or indicated on the enrollment sheets?"

34. "?. No problems, because I was unaware of who was taking it as pass-fail, I never did find out, really."

35. "No. Most of the time I wasn't aware that both kinds of students were in the group. There really didn't seem to be any problems, as far as I am concerned."

36. "?. I feel that classes with (probably) large proportions of pass-fail students in them are a challenge to the instructor to interest and involve those students who might be otherwise inclined to compete less strenuously. As I stated above, they sometimes feel that they do not have to complete the readings and/or study them as conscientiously as those getting A, B, etc."

37. "No. I do not make a point of determining who is a pass-fail student. If I had a class with only pass-fail students, I would use different criteria for topic selection and grading than I do for a "mixed" class."

38. "?. No problems."

39. "?. No apparent difficulties - but then I never knew who was participating on a pass-fail basis."

40. "?. No difficulties."

41. "?. I have encountered no problems in teaching classes which have had both pass-fail students and non-pass-fail students."

42. "No. The course considered all students as if they were all seeking the standard grading system."

43. "?. I assume that some students took my course by pass-fail grading policy. However, I did not know which students, nor how many students, were taking the course by pass-fail. Therefore all students were graded by the same standard."

44. "?. No conflicts."

45. "?. No problems. I never know which students were on pass-fail so this can not affect the grading in any way."

46. "No. I never gave it any thought since I had no idea what percentage were on pass-fail."

47. "?. I assume this was the case, since I never knew I had pass-fail students in the class and graded as usual. Since there is no way of knowing a student is pass-fail unless he tells you (and I think this is good) it is difficult to answer these questions in a meaningful way."

48. "No. I again fail to see the advantages to pass-fail. It seems to me that it works to the advantage of D-students only, for they get the honor of "pass" as do A-B-C students, but avoid the stigma of "poor"."

49. "?. No difficulties."

50. "No. I had an all pass-fail section once. I didn't like it very much."

51. "No. Not obviously. There seems to be an increasing number of absences, but I have not been able to identify the 3-6 pass-fail students per class accurately enough to see much evidence of correlation between either grades or attendance and pass-fail status. My own subjective feeling is strongly against the pass-fail system. I would abolish it! I have known a few psychology majors who took courses in their major on pass-fail and ended up with "pass" on their record when they could have had "A"."

52. "No. In advanced class they had a higher per cent of A's and B's than credit students!! But they usually averaged a little lower."

Perusal of responses to faculty question 3 shows two types of reactions prevelant: (a) those who saw no problems because they did not know who the P-N students were, and (b) those who found out, sometimes accidentally. The majority of the latter group could tell that P-N students were not working as hard as others, and sometimes not doing the reading. This observation fits perfectly with the sharp drop in GPR for students taking P-N courses.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This summary will be devoted chiefly to answering the questions raised on page 3 of this document. The data obtained are those for the most recently available semester: Semester II, 1971-72. The P-N students were first identified, and data were obtained for each. Some 1206 students took a P-N course. A 35% sample or 420 students were sent a questionnaire about their P-N experience, and 265 usable responses were received. The faculty who had one or more P-N students were also polled, and about 68% responded. Following are some of the more important findings.

The actual courses offered for P-N credit were not tallied, but nearly every major was represented among P-N students. Courses offered under the option have been reported in communications from the deans. The courses most frequently chosen appeared to be some of those in physical education along with lecture forum which is strictly a P-N course.

It was found that the "averaged" GPR in P-N courses was 2.33, compared to 2.99 for all courses that semester, and 2.87 for a cumulative average at the end of that semester. In the great majority of cases the P-N grade was below both the cumulative and the semester GPR.

In determining why students take P-N courses, distinction should be made between what students say on a questionnaire and what is said in private. More than half of the student respondents said they took such courses to "learn without pressure or emotional strain", while over 40% chose "remove the inhibition of a grading system." About 45% checked "pursue an academically unfamiliar area without fear of a poor grade", while a few chose a course outside the major to "satisfy intellectual curiosity." A very few used the option to "carry more credits." But significantly, 66% chose the option to "accept a pass in order to devote more time to my other school subjects." The investigator polled his class in tests and measurements as to which was the principal reason. There was concensus that the chief use of the P-N option is to get easy credits and

fatten the GPR on other courses. Comments of students give many reasons, but it is clear that most were conscious of grade point ratio and wanted to protect it via P-N courses -- especially from tough grading instructors. There is some evidence to indicate that P-N students do average heavier loads than others: something that few acknowledge. While about half the students indicated that they put in about the same amount of time on P-N courses as on others, 40% said they used less time. It was shown (Table 2) that the majority of students who accepted a pass to devote more time to other subjects also said they spent less time on the P-N course than on others.

The most frequently cited use of the P-N course was to fulfill a requirement not in the major or minor, while a number used the option for work in the major. Only 26% of respondents used the option for an elective course, and only 17 students used the option for "other purposes."

Some students admit they take P-N courses to avoid low grades in tough courses. This fact, coupled with the somewhat higher semester GPR compared to cumulative suggests that P-N courses do inflate the GPR somewhat.

If student views are valid, courses in physical education and lecture forum seem most appropriate for the P-N option. However, it is difficult to buy the idea that "tough" courses should be offered pass-fail.

In general, the faculty found few problems with the employment of the P-N option. Some thought that "fail" should include D students also. Others thought they should know who the P-N students were so they would not have to grade their papers so carefully (which seems to suggest that many faculty <u>do not</u> use their tests to teach.) Most noticeable were the comments indicating that P-N students were identified as being less motivated and doing less work than others.

INVESTIGATOR'S CONCLUSIONS

Comments of the students themselves are most revealing. While giving lip service to relieved tensions and learning for the sake of learning, most students have admitted they take P-N courses to loaf in some courses while using the time to do better in others. The chief reason given for deciding they would not take a course on the P-N basis if they had the choice again was that the grade was better than expected; they would like to take back the decision if it turned out "wrong." In other words, these students would like to have their cake and eat it too.

To the best of our knowledge, then, the P-N option produces lower quality scholarship, tampers with the integrity of the grade point ratio as an indicator of scholar by inflating the GPR, and produces larger than normal student loads. The option tends to lower, rather than raise, student motivation.

The grade point ratio has great value to the student who achieves in college. It is the mediocre student who wants P-N courses to claim he is on a par with others. Granted there are exceptions; I am talking about the rule. But this faculty should decide whether to maintain a grade point ratio that has integrity or go without one.

university of wisconsin/stevens point • stevens point, wisconsin 54481 • 715/346-5355

Department of Institutional Research

December 4, 1972

Dear Sir or Madam:

University records indicate that you have recently at least once chosen a pass-fail grading option in your course work. The Faculty Senate will soon be reviewing the present policies concerning pass-fail courses. Student participation in this review is important. Please complete the enclosed confidential form and return it to me promptly, either by campus mail or in an enclosed franked envelope.

Your questionnaire response will require only a few minutes of time. There is no time for a follow-up, and you cannot be replaced in the sampling. Since the response is intended to be anonymous, you should not sign your name, but please be quite frank.

Sincerely yours,

William H. Clements

William H. Clements
Director of Institutional Research & Studies

WHC/kj

Encl.

QUESTIONNAIRE ON PASS-FAIL GRADING

Please read carefully and respond to questions as indicated below.

1. Have you taken on a pass-fail basis one or more courses at UW-Stevens Point?

   Yes _____ No _____

   (If no, please do not respond beyond this point)

   If yes, how many courses have you taken on a pass-fail basis? _____

2. If yes, please check your reason or reasons for choosing the pass-fail option. (Also answer further questions)

   a. _____ Learn without pressure or emotional strain.

   b. _____ Remove the inhibition of a grading system.

   c. _____ Pursue an academically unfamiliar area without fear of a poor grade.

   d. _____ Satisfy my intellectual curiosity in an area outside my major.

   e. _____ Accept a pass in order to devote more time to my other school subjects.

   f. _____ Carry more credits than could have been carried without a pass-fail course.

   g. _____ Other (explain) _____

   _____

   _____

3. How much time and effort did you spend on the pass-fail course(s) compared to other courses? (Please check)

   _____ More time & effort _____ About the same time & effort _____ Less time & effort

4. For what purpose(s) did you use the pass-fail course(s)? (Please check)

   a. _____ For work in the major.

   b. _____ For work in the minor.

   c. _____ Fulfill a requirement not in major or minor.

   d. _____ Elective course.

   e. _____ Other (specify) _____

   _____

5. Knowing what you now know, do you consider it worthwhile to have taken the course(s) you did on the pass-fail basis?

   Yes _____ No _____

   If not, why not? (Explain) _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

PLEASE RETURN TO OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, 056 MAIN, UW-SP

DATE: December 22, 1972

TO: of UW-SP Faculty

FROM: William H. Clements, Director of Institutional Research & Studies

RE: Evaluation of Pass-Fail Grading Policy W.H.C.

Vice Chancellor Haferbecker has asked me to obtain some facts concerning our pass-fail grading policy as it has operated, for use of the Faculty Senate in reviewing the pass-fail grading option. I have chosen Semester 2, 1971-72, as the time period for such study. Our records show that you had pass-fail students enrolled in one or more of your courses during that semester. If this is true, please answer the following questions and return by campus mail to:

William H. Clements, Dir. of Institutional Research, 056 Main Bldg.

1. Did you conduct the class(es) any different when pass-fail students were involved?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   Comments _____

   _____

   _____

2. Were grading standards any different in pass-fail courses from other courses?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   Please Explain _____

   _____

   _____

3. Did you have any class which included both pass-fail students and non-pass-fail students?

   _____ Yes _____ No

   If yes, did the inclusion of both kinds of students pose any difficulties to you as instructor? (Please comment) _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

Thank You for your help.